

OPENING THE WAY: A NEW HEMI-SYNC® SERIES TO SUPPORT PREGNANCY AND BIRTH

by Janet L. M. Henneke, Midwife

Janet L. M. Henneke is a midwife with a home birth practice in the Texas Hill Country near Hunt, Texas. She is also a childbirth reform activist who is promoting natural alternatives to medicated birth and educating women about personal empowerment through active participation in the birth process. Her first experience with Hemi-Sync was through the Discovery album from the Gateway Experience®. She credits the use of those tapes at home with expanding her own awareness and creativity. The ideas for a pregnancy and birth series came to her at the piano.

Introduction

For some time I have observed that women who are experiencing totally unmedicated natural birth seem to attain altered states of consciousness. Although they remain able to respond to simple questions and move about physically, they become more and more “detached” from waking consciousness as their labors progress. These mothers do not seem to experience their labors as painful. Often they appear to be almost “asleep,” though assuredly they are working very hard on an internal level. Signs of this shift of consciousness are welcomed by midwives, who traditionally call it “going to the moon,” because it usually means that the labor is progressing normally and the baby will soon arrive. (However, most midwives do not think of this state as an “altered state of consciousness,” just as most people do not think of the sleep state in that way.)

Conversely, I have observed that women whose labors and go on hour after hour without progress, are usually women who for some reason have great difficulty “letting go.” They frequently have a strong need to remain in control, which manifests as excessive tension, pain, and fear; they fight their labors. These mothers often have very long, difficult births. While it is possible for the natural labor process to wear them down to the point of “letting go,” what generally happens is that they receive epidural anesthesia and, quite often, a cesarean section at the hospital. In labors like this, the medical interventions are quite a humane alternative, which I do not oppose.

However, as my personal knowledge of Hemi-Sync® grew over the past three years, I had the idea that it could be used to help women in labor shift to another level of consciousness that would facilitate the birth process. Just as the Going Home® series helps to make transition out of the physical body easier by familiarizing people with altered states of consciousness, I

hypothesized that Hemi-Sync might assist the birthing mother by helping her learn to easily relinquish physical waking consciousness.

Testing Hemi-Sync in Labor

I contacted The Monroe Institute with my idea. Together we created a tape with the sound of ocean waves (a familiar theme on the Hemi-Sync tapes and also familiar to many childbirth educators as an analogy to describe labor contractions), simple musical themes, and basic delta wave frequencies. In cooperation with Dr. Justine Owens, a researcher from the University of Virginia who has been consulting with The Monroe Institute, we designed a pilot project to test the tape during actual labors at the Birth and Women's Center, a freestanding birth center in Dallas, Texas. Dr. Owens also located a psychological instrument to evaluate levels of anxiety during labor. The instrument was developed by Dr. Regina Lederman, who granted us permission to use it.

Expectant mothers were asked to participate in a study to evaluate the effects of music on relaxation during labor. Of the seventeen women who were due to birth in January 1995, four birthed before I arrived in Dallas, four birthed after my departure on January 30, and one chose not to participate. One wanted to participate but birthed while I was not present to play the tapes and complete the surveys. This means that the tape was actually tested at only eight births, which is a very small sample. Thus, the results cannot be evaluated statistically with any reliability. However, many observations can be made.

Of course, what we would have liked to observe during this pilot project would have been a significant reduction in hours of labor or incidence of problems requiring transfer of care to a hospital or another such objective indicator. We did not get anything so clear-cut. In fact, the number of clients transferred to a hospital from the birth center during the month of January was unusually high. The consensus opinion attributed this to the preponderance of first-time mothers with prolonged rupture of membranes. Prolonged rupture of membranes necessitates transfer of care within twelve to twenty-four hours due to the risk of infection.

What we did get was the overwhelmingly favorable endorsement of the tapes by the birthing families and caregivers. It was quite clear that every mother who listened to the tapes—and often fathers and friends as well—entered into altered consciousness quickly and easily. For want of a better term, I will refer to this state as the “birth zone.” In one very dramatic case, a mother arrived at the Birth Center screaming in pain with every contraction. After five minutes of Hemi-Sync she noted that the contractions were no longer unmanageable and settled into a comfortable side-lying position. She only roused to go to the bathroom. Within four hours she dilated to eight centimeters—very rapid progress for a first-timer.

In an equally dramatic case, a mother had never before experienced unmedicated birth and found Hemi-Sync to be so effective for pain that she made it through transition—the last three

centimeters of dilation that most women find to be most difficult—without the expected sedative. She called for the tape again to relieve postpartum pain. Indications that the tape helped mothers who had had several babies but were experiencing ineffective pre-labor patterns were inconclusive but intriguing. They seemed to establish effective patterns resulting in very rapid deliveries from the point of time when Hemi-Sync was introduced.

Another finding was speculative, but we believe it is important for designing the final tapes for the pregnancy and childbirth series. Deep delta frequencies may not be ideal for the second or “active” stage of labor when the mother is pushing. In at least one labor the contractions seemed to be rather weak and infrequent during second stage. In the births that were very fast, the tape had been turned off before pushing began. The technical staff at The Monroe Institute believe that a slightly different combination of frequencies will encourage a more active-alert state of consciousness during second stage. This is being incorporated into a separate tape with more theta wave frequencies to be played after full dilation has been reached. I am currently researching the “ecstatic trance” state, including specific body postures and rhythms that seem to help induce it. I believe that the birthing woman is completely grounded in the physical body and in the “birth zone” simultaneously—a sort of “in-the-body/out-of-body” state.

The results of using Hemi-Sync during labor were impressive. The tapes definitely seemed to help mothers without previous training or exposure to Hemi-Sync to get into the “birth zone.” It is possible that with prior training in the use of Hemi-Sync, as well as an understanding of how an altered state of consciousness may relate to a successful natural birth, even complicated cases may yield to the beneficial effects of the tapes.

The Pregnancy and Childbirth Series

My understanding of the power of the Monroe approach has grown beyond that of a way to assist a mother into the “birth zone.” Working with the professional staff and incorporating my knowledge of childbirth into actual scripts for the series, I realized that this is really a tool for personal transformation.

A great deal of fear is attached to childbirth in our society. After all, it has become associated with major surgery! The cesarean section rate in the United States is 25 percent and as high as 50 percent at some hospitals. Birth has become technologized and dehumanized. It is tragic that one of the potentially most sublime and powerful events of a woman’s life has become so threatening. As fear feeds on itself, a young woman birthing for the first time is more likely to require major interventions in what should be a natural and normal event.

The tapes can reintroduce a sense of the positive nature of pregnancy and birth that seems to have been lost. The expectant mother will have a whole set of “tools” to take into her labor. She will then approach the impending birth more confidently.

Emotional Clearing:

An entire tape is devoted to emotional clearing. Unresolved personal issues—abuse, previous abortions, doubts about parenting, etc.—can interfere with the birth process.

Physical and Emotional Balancing:

The tapes contain positive suggestions about “balancing and equalizing” the physical body and the emotions. Such suggestions, used successfully in the Positive Immunity series, are also resources for the pregnant, birthing, and postpartum woman. This focus returns us to ancient wisdom about how the expectant mother’s happiness and serenity affect the baby.

Pain Relief:

The Institute’s Surgical Support Series has already demonstrated dramatic applications for the relief of pain. *[Medical Specialities/Surgery/HSJ 1991-3 Use of the Emergency Series During Multiple Surgeries - Gari Carter]*

The mother can use this application to relieve the discomforts of pregnancy and the pain of labor, perhaps reducing or eliminating the need for obstetrical drugs. After all, during unmedicated labor the body releases large quantities of endorphins, the body’s natural pain relieving substances. If the mother can cooperate with this natural mechanism, maybe anesthesia and analgesia, with their possible harmful effects on the immature nervous system of the baby, can be avoided.

Preparing the Father and Other Support Team Members:

There will also be a tape for the father or other caregiver. Experiencing the “birth zone” for himself could help the father to better understand the birth process. This tape will also help a father understand the intimacy of birth and how vulnerable and suggestible a woman in the “birth zone” becomes. It will enable him to provide appropriate support to his partner.

Relating to the Unborn Baby:

Perhaps the most startling application of Hemi-Sync that has developed in relation to this series is the tape titled “Contacting the Baby’s Soul.” Just as the *Going Home* series includes a tape for contacting the soul of a person who has left physical incarnation, the pregnancy and childbirth series will include a tape to help parents contact the soul of their baby before birth. This is a logical extension of the concept that we are “more than our physical bodies.” To date, this is an entirely untested portion of the series. We are open to the results of this new journey of human consciousness, in the true exploratory spirit bequeathed to us by Robert Monroe.

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